



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015

<https://archive.org/details/b22274200>

BANEFUL CUSTOM
OF
INTERMENT IN TOWNS,

AND

THE PRESENT STATE

OF

The York Grave Yards.

A LECTURE, DELIVERED IN THE MERCHANTS' HALL, YORK,

ON THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 1847,

BY ALFRED E. HARGROVE.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF

THE YORK HEALTH OF TOWNS' ASSOCIATION.

YORK:

PRINTED AT THE HERALD-OFFICE, PAVEMENT;

AND MAY BE HAD OF THE SECRETARIES OF THE YORK HEALTH OF TOWNS' ASSOCIATION,
OR OF ANY OF THE YORK BOOKSELLERS.

1847.

TO THE

RIGHT HON. LORD VISCOUNT MORPETH, M.P.,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

(WITH HIS LORDSHIP'S PERMISSION,)

AS A TOKEN OF HIGH ESTEEM

FOR THE GREAT EXERTIONS OF HIS LORDSHIP IN AID OF

SANITARY REFORM,

AND IN PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS, GENERAL COMFORT,

AND PROSPERITY OF THE PEOPLE,

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S OBLIGED,

AND MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

ALFRED E. HARGROVE.

INTERMENT IN TOWNS, AND THE YORK GRAVE-YARDS.



AT a time like the present, when the Public Health has become a matter of serious consideration, I conceive it to be the duty of every one to come forward, and assist in aiding the existing movement for Sanitary Reform. Under this impression, I have cheerfully complied with the request of some members of the York Health of Towns'

Association, to state my opinions on Intra-Mural Interment, to which I have paid considerable attention.

It is a subject which is entitled to the most serious consideration of all classes; and I trust I shall be able to convince you, by the facts I shall adduce, that the mortality produced, by the present system of burying the dead in the midst of the living, is far greater than is generally believed.

In no city is an inquiry of this kind so much wanted as in York; for, where do grave-yards abound to a greater extent? or, where are they more crowded? Desecration is daily taking place—desecration of the most indecent, disgusting, and pestilential nature. Corpses are consigned to our crowded church-yards, already sodden with human flesh and gore, or

deposited in a damp and ill-closed vault, either under the pew of some family, in their parish church, or in the aisle, where, probably, a stove is erected, the heat from which draws forth the noxious fumes of corruption, and the unsuspecting congregation inhale that, which, in many cases, has terminated in *death*.

“Decently to dispose of the dead,” says a popular writer, “and vigilantly secure their remains from violation, are among the first duties of society; our domestic endearments—our social attachments—our national prepossessions, respect and sanctify the resting places of our forefathers. The most barbarous of mankind would burn with indignation at beholding the last remains of a beloved relative exposed, mangled, or mutilated—and yet, among us, in a moral and Christian country, the abode of the dead is openly violated—its deposits are sacrilegiously disturbed and ejected—the tender solitudes of survivors are cruelly sported with, and the identity of relationship is destroyed—so eager indeed has sometimes been the haste to dispossess previous occupants, that time has not even been allowed for the gradual dissipation of decaying human putrescence, which is given out in gaseous profusion, contaminating, as it circulates, the habitations of the living.”

Public feeling has often broken forth, as graves have been violated, and the labouring classes have been heard to complain that those in charge of the burial ground “would not allow time for the poor bones to decay.” Popular sentiments, too, are offended, and very justly so, by such open practices as that of using an iron borer, to bore down and ascertain whether the ground is occupied by a coffin, and whether it and its contents are sufficiently decayed for removal. The mischief does not end here; if a sound coffin is found, the borer is withdrawn, and the hole remains—a chimney, by which the effluvia—poisonous as it is—may escape from the mouldering body.

Dr. Adam Clarke was so firmly impressed with the bad effects arising from Intra-Mural Interment, that he declared, "No burial places should be tolerated within cities or towns, much less in, or about, churches and chapels. The system is excessively injurious to the inhabitants, and especially to those who frequent public worship in such chapels and churches. Heaven, decency, and health, forbid the shocking abomination. * * * * *

From long observation, I can attest that churches and chapels, situated in grave-yards, and those especially within whose walls the dead are interred, are perfectly unwholesome, and many, by attending such places, are shortening their passage to the house appointed for all living. What increases the iniquity of this abominable and deadly work is, that the burial grounds, attached to many churches and chapels, are made a source of gain. The whole of this preposterous conduct is as indecorous and unhealthy, as it is profane. Every man should know that the gas which is disengaged from putrid flesh, and particularly from a human body, is not only unfriendly to, but destructive of, animal life."

An interesting picture may be drawn of the country graveyard, with its wicket, and solemn yews, and green mounds—the tombstones of the old servants of the manor house—and the grey church-tower, half hidden with its thick ivy. But village church-yards I need not here allude to—their harvest is garnered slowly, and the dead may moulder to dust in them. Set against this picture the grim gaunt loathsomeness of the city burial grounds, even those through which a comfortable congregation wend their way, weekly, to an orthodox sermon, and where the vicar has a true Anglo-Catholic respect for outward decency in all the ordinances. The grass grows in it. Rich as the soil is—little more than decomposed animal matter—it is too often moved for the growth of docks and nettles, that generally luxuriate in such places. Tread cautiously when you leave the path, or your foot may sink

into something clammier and fouler than earth. The sexton is hard worked, and cannot afford much depth of soil. As it is, no new tenant is taken in without an ejection. Not many of the inmates of these narrow beds are allowed to fulfil their destiny of "dust to dust;" and it is to this I would first draw your attention.

The grave-yards of York are in a most disgraceful and revolting state; but, before I proceed to notice them severally, it will be interesting to inquire how Intra-Mural Interment first originated; and then I will briefly—very briefly—trace the progress of the nuisance to the present time.

Upwards of three thousand years ago, the children of Israel had a sanitary code of laws, and also an efficient sanitary police. The Egyptians honored the last resting places of their friends; and to break open a tomb—to scatter here and there the mouldering bones—was horrible sacrilege. In some places, even a person rendered himself impure by only walking over the place where a body was interred. No buildings were ever erected in the neighbourhood of sepulchres; and every care was taken, as far as possible, to separate the living from the dead. The Persians, Assyrians, Medes, Parthians, Tyrians, Phœnicians, and Æthiopians, had always vaults for their dead. The Chinese and the Peruvians, situate at opposite extremities of the earth, adopted the same practice, in this respect; and the ancient Russians, and the Danes, entombed the bodies of their princes amid the recesses of their most solitary mountains. In the lapse of time, the fear of profanation had so increased, that the burning of the dead commenced. From the moment of reduction to ashes, their repose was considered secure. The ashes, however, were excluded from the interior of cities, and the urns were deposited in the ordinary burial grounds, outside the walls. Hence the vast number of urns, which, from time to time, have been exhumed on the south side of Micklegate Bar, and in other parts of the vicinity of York.

When the standard of the cross was raised—when the tenets of Christianity were disseminated, mankind adopted different opinions, and the custom of burning the dead gradually sank into desuetude. In the midst of every change, however, the influence of law was always exerted to separate the living from the dead, and the grand principle of constructing tombs away from cities was ever kept in view. The Jews dreaded all communication with the dead; so much so, that travellers were even forbidden to walk upon places where bodies were deposited, and which were distinguished by the erection of small pillars. Caverns and fields, far away from the busy haunts of men, were used by them for the purposes of burial. The whole religious doctrine and mythology of the Greeks tended to support the laws, which directed the bodies of the dead to be removed to a distance from the dwellings of the living.

The unmeasured contempt with which the religion of Jesus Christ was received—that religion, which was destined to enlighten the dark places of the earth—caused the early Christians to be generally despised, and, consequently, their burial was mean in the extreme. As the numbers of the faithful increased, and the martyrs were multiplied, the Christians determined to seek for the bodies of saints, and to deposit them in the catacombs of Rome. In these dark retreats, the Christians celebrated the rites of their religion. The number of believers increased daily, and the martyrs were so numerous, that the ordinary burial places were no longer sufficient. Many patricians and Roman ladies gave vast portions of land, to be appropriated for the purposes of burial; and hence the origin of cemeteries, of which there were, ultimately, not less than forty in the immediate neighbourhood of ancient Rome. At length, Constantine, by embracing Christianity, proclaimed peace; and now the altars, on which the mysteries of the cross had been celebrated, amidst the obscurity of the catacombs, were removed into the

city. Then commenced the desire of having tombs in the vicinity of the holy shrines. All wished to be interred near those, whose memories were held in veneration. Nay, to such an extreme length did they extend their superstition, that they believed the *emanations* from the bodies of the saints were capable of warming the hearts of the faithful. The tombs were placed along the walls, near to, but without, the churches. As people met there to perform their religious duties, it was soon requisite to protect them from exposure to the weather; and, for this purpose, they constructed vestibules and porticoes. Up to that time, they had not dared to penetrate into the interior of the churches—as yet, the dead were not allowed to cross the threshold—but the time rapidly approached, when every vacant nook and corner were eagerly seized upon, for the purposes of interment. Constantine was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles, which he had built. The bishops claimed the same privilege soon after, and the laity afterwards obtained a similar concession, by presenting handsome donations to the church. As the various religious orders increased, the custom of burying in the interior of churches became general; but the venerable Bede tells us, that the portico of Canterbury cathedral was filled, ere the interior of the church was molested.

Many attempts have been made, at different periods, to prevent the continuance of so unhealthy and dangerous a practice, but without success. It, however, would never have grown to the intolerable height which it has done, had it not been aided by the pride of the rich, a reverence for the relics of saints, and the absurd belief, which was rooted in the minds of the people, that a grave in the cloister, the galilee, the chapel, or the aisle, was a stronghold for protection against the arch enemy. This absurdity, however, is fast wearing away; and the great opposition with which we have to contend, is the respect of the present generation for

the past. When a son or a daughter dies, they wish to be buried in the family vault, where the father and mother repose ; and females especially wish to be deposited near the mouldering remains of their friends. This may, however, easily be managed, and yet the public health not suffer. No city in the kingdom possesses a more beautiful cemetery than ours. There the dead may rest in peace, and the bones of the departed may easily be transferred from the dilapidated family vault, in the still more dilapidated church, to rest permanently beneath the verdant hillocks of the *Père la Chaise* of York.

Having now traced the progress of Intra-Mural Interment, I will explain the present position of the grave-yards of our city. I will attempt to show you how *utterly inadequate* they are, for the requirements of the population ; and I will prove that the *malaria* which is evolved from them is *prejudicial to health*. I will also show that their present crowded state is the cause of many acts of *indecent and desecration*. The facts I have partly obtained from existing documents, and partly by recent inquiries.

There are no less than twenty-three parishes in the city, but there are twenty-four church-yards, the parish of St. George being united with St. Dennis, yet having its own grave-yard. Of this number, five have been closed—I trust for ever—viz., St. Saviour ; All Saints, Pavement ; St. Michael, Spurriergate ; Holy Trinity, Goodramgate ; and St. John, Micklegate. To these, therefore, I need not allude, further than to say, that burials were not discontinued, until it was *absolutely impossible to find room for any more graves*.

The grave-yard of ST. MARTIN-LE-GRAND, has been represented to be closed, but a funeral having taken place there, within the past few weeks, leads me to think my information is incorrect. The whole of the burial-ground is seen from the street. It has been twice buried over in the time of the present sexton, and consequently graves cannot be made very

deep. One gentleman informs me that he has seen coffins buried, with only eighteen inches of earth upon them—in other words, *only eighteen inches below the surface*. The formation of the vault for the recent funeral, to which I have alluded, caused a great number of bones to be disturbed, and many of these mouldering remains were removed, along with the surplus earth, to be thrown into some depôt for rubbish—or, it may be, to mend some road in the neighbouring suburbs. Well might Henry Kirke White exclaim—

“And who would lay
His body in the city burial place,
To be thrown up again by some rude sexton,
And yield its narrow house another tenant,
Ere the moist flesh had mingled with the dust?”

The Parish of ALL SAINTS, Northstreet, includes a population, according to the last census, of about 1,200. There are two burial grounds; one, twenty yards long, by seven wide; the other about twice the size. They are closely surrounded by buildings, are half filled, and have already been more than once buried over. Between two and three corpses are interred here every month, and consequently putrefaction is constantly going forward.

CHRIST'S PARISH grave-yard contains about 220 superficial yards, and has also been buried over more than once.

ST. CRUX possesses a burial ground in Hungate, 25 yards by 13, and no part of it has recently been buried over more than once, but the approach to it is very bad, and the neighbourhood thickly populated; besides, I am told that graves there are frequently filled with water.

ST. CUTHBERT'S, Peasholme-green, is one of the worst now remaining open. It is calculated to contain about 2,000 square yards, but is considered far too small. It has been buried over twice during the last quarter of a century; and graves, in a great part of it, cannot be made deeper than four feet, in consequence of the water, and owing to former interments. Still, room has to be found for the repose of five parishioners every month.

ST. DENNIS' church-yard is of very small extent, and has long been insufficient for the parish. It has been repeatedly buried over, and it is now extremely difficult to find a spot for interment, without disturbing coffins, which have only been buried four or five years.

ST. GEORGE'S burial ground is an old one, lately re-enclosed, and contains about 59 perches. Interments in this ground are highly improper, since many parties dying of *the cholera* were buried here. The parish, as just stated, is united with that of St. Dennis, and the burials average nearly five per month.

ST. LAWRENCE'S is about 48 yards by 28 yards. It is one of the best in York, no part of it having recently been buried over more than once, and the number of funerals not averaging more than two and a half per month.

ST. MARGARET'S church-yard is about 60 yards by 45, and, like that of St. Lawrence, has not recently been buried over more than once. The interments average four per month, although the graves *cannot be made deep*, in consequence of water.

ST. MARY, BISHOPHILL, JUN., is, without doubt, one of the *worst and most overcrowded* places of interment in the city. The church-yard is much too small, and a funeral scarcely ever takes place, without disturbing other remains, and breaking coffins. Some idea may, therefore, be formed of the *terrible desecration* going forward, when I state that four interments take place here monthly.

ST. MARY, Castlegate. This grave-yard is by no means so crowded as some others, and graves can be made six or seven feet deep. It is, however, surrounded by buildings; and the average number of funerals is two per month.

ST. MAURICE'S, Monkgate, is, partly, a very old ground, consequently, it is not known how often it has been buried over, but the new portion is not yet full. The monthly interments are about five; therefore, the ground is rapidly filling.

ST. MICHAEL-LE-BELFREY has its burial-ground in the Groves-lane. It was consecrated in the year 1800, and is 38 yards long by 16 broad. It is utterly insufficient for the wants of the parish, containing, with St. Wilfred, Minster Yard, and Mint Yard annexed, a population of nearly 3,000 people. It has been entirely buried over three times. In many parts, no burials can take place, the ground being *filled to the surface*. In no case can a grave be dug, without disturbing former interments; sound coffins are frequently exposed, and decayed ones, with bones, are *always unavoidably disinterred*. I think this grave-yard may be safely considered *the most disgraceful* in the city, and the parishioners do not seem to approve of it so much as they formerly did, for, some years ago, the monthly average of funerals was three. It is now only one.

ST. OLAVE'S, Marygate, has a church-yard, containing about 3,000 square yards, but it is insufficient for the parish. It has long been used as a burial-ground, and must, of necessity, have been frequently buried over. It is a common occurrence, to see fragments of coffins and bones thrown up, when graves are being dug. Four corpses are deposited here every month.

ST. MARY, BISHOPHILL, SEN., like its name-sake, St. Mary, Bishophill, Jun., has only a small church-yard, and it is nearly in as bad a state. It is occupied, in every part, with graves, filled very near to the surface, and former interments are *frequently disturbed*. In 1845, there were twenty-four interments; in 1846, forty; and from January 1 to June 1, during the present year, there have been sixteen.

HOLY TRINITY, Micklegate, has a burial-ground about 48 yards long, and partly 14, and partly 28, yards broad. It has frequently been buried over, and is quite insufficient for the parish; consequently, *the iron borer* is constantly in use. In the year 1846, there were twenty-seven bodies interred; and up to the close of May, during the present year, there were twelve

ST. HELEN'S, Stonegate, has a very confined small piece of ground, for a grave-yard, in Davygate. It has been many times buried over; and, as a last resort, *rubbish* has been led in, by which means it has been raised about three feet above the street. Corpses are consequently not buried *in* what is termed consecrated ground, but merely *upon* it. What may we suppose will be the result of thus raising the ground? At some future day, improvements may require the entire removal of *this nuisance*—for nuisance it is to all the houses around—and then desecration will take place to a disgusting extent. The funerals used to average six or eight in a year, but the dreadful state of the ground is now so evident, that they have decreased to about two.

ST. SAMPSON'S church-yard, as is well known, adjoins the Fish Market. It contains about 30 perches, and is in such a disgusting state, that no interments can take place without interfering with human remains. In some parts, too, it is so *wet and swampy*, that graves have been known to be partly filled with water, prior to the interment taking place; and when the coffin has been lowered, it has plunged out of sight, into a mass of *loathsome mire*, whilst the mourners have *shuddered* around. The number of corpses buried here last year was eleven, and it must be borne in mind that this is in a densely populated district, and in the very heart of the city.

ST. MARTIN-CUM-GREGORY, Micklegate, has a very old grave-yard. It contains about 37 perches, and is in an exceedingly crowded state. In fact, *graves are violated* whenever an interment takes place; and, in hot weather, *the exhalations* from the grave-yard *have been distinctly felt, in the street*, by passers by. Fourteen burials took place in 1845, and nine in 1846.

Besides these church-yards, there are two or three other grave-yards, viz.:—the Friends' burial-ground, on Bishophill; the Unitarian chapel-yard, in St. Saviourgate; a small yard behind Lendal Chapel, &c. None of these, however, are

very crowded; but I would make no exception to the one general rule, of ceasing to inter the dead in the midst of populous districts.

This is the state of the grave-yards of York, and I need scarcely attempt to describe the strange scenes, which, from time to time, have taken place therein. I will, however, state one or two. In opening a grave in one of the church-yards, a considerable quantity of bones were exhumed, some of them with *fragments of flesh* still adhering. A hungry dog entered the sacred ground, seized a leg bone in his mouth, and bore it away in triumph to his lair, where he doubtless would *feast* on the putrifying remnant of mortality. The bone which I hold in my hand, a portion of a skull, was rescued from a group of children, in Walmgate, who had by some means become possessed of the greater portion of a skeleton, with which they were amusing themselves. I have seen as many as six skeletons, in different stages of decay, thrown up in the formation of one grave, and the effluvia which has arisen, and tainted the neighbouring thoroughfare, has been of the most *fearful* and of the most *poisonous description*. I would ask,—

“Can such things be,
And overcome us like a summer cloud,
Without our special wonder?”

Well may a recent writer say, “A truce to cant about the amenities, the decency, and the refinement of a Christian land—a truce to the vexatious opposition, which is often raised against the necessary anatomical inspection of corpses. A Christian land, forsooth! Go to the unbelieving Turk, nay, the Mussulman of any land—see the reverence with which he treats the dead. See his beautiful cemeteries, with their flowers, and vistas, bordered with cypress and myrtle, fit emblems of the gloomy tomb. A Christian land, forsooth! Why, our system of burial is *the very opposite* of all that is gentle, liberal, and refined;” and what is worse, it is calculated to produce *fevers* and *pestilence* of the worst description.

I have now given you some little idea of the state of the grave-yards of York. We have examined the *exterior* of the churches; let us now enter the *interior* of the venerable fabrics, and, as we do so, our footsteps will sound hollow on the pavement over which we walk. There is scarcely a church in our city, the floor of which has not been *excavated, in every direction*, for a repository of the dead, and whose pavements are not inscribed with the virtues of the departed, who repose beneath. Now, we all know that confined air is dangerous, from whatever cause it may proceed. We also know, that the atmosphere, in all places of public worship, is ordinarily moist and heavy. It acquires this, from the emanations of the congregations who there assemble. What, then, must be the nature of this air, when it is largely impregnated with *sepulchral exhalations*, which penetrate through the interstices of the flags that cover the vaults? Must it not be impure and unwholesome? It is both—it is also *poisonous*! I say this on the authority of Sir Benjamin Brodie, and those who know his character will not, I am sure, accuse him of exaggerating. He says, “the gas evolved from bodies which are decomposing, is chiefly sulphureted hydrogen—a gas so *noxious* and so *deadly*, that the admixture of one part of it with 500 parts of atmospheric air, is almost *immediately fatal*.”

Mr. Walker, an eminent surgeon, in London, who has paid great attention to this subject, says, “In addition to this deadly ingredient, other dangerous gases are liberated amongst the products of putrefaction. They give rise to the nauseous deadly smell which accompanies the last metamorphosis of the human frame, and which prepares us for a separation from the bodies of the dead for ever. They render the gaseous products much heavier than they otherwise would be, if composed of unmixed gas; and, finally, they give rise to most of the injuries to health inflicted by the respiration of grave-yard atmospheres, because the gases

themselves, when breathed in a pure state, are not found to produce similar results."

It has been proved, by indubitable evidence, that the noxious matter from grave-yards is as capable of entering the system by *inspiration*, when minute particles of it are diffused in the atmosphere, as when it is directly introduced into the blood by a wound. Dr. Southwood Smith declares, that, "when diffused in the air, these minute particles are conveyed into the system through the thin and delicate walls of the air vesicles of the lungs, in the act of inspiration. The mode in which the air vesicles are formed and disposed, is such, as to give to the human lungs an almost incredible extent of absorbing surface, while at every point of this surface there is a vascular tube ready to receive any substance imbibed by it, and to carry it *at once* to the current of the circulation. Hence the instantaneous and the dreadful energy with which certain poisons act upon the system, when brought into contact with the pulmonary surface."

Facts, such as these, help us to understand the production and propagation of disease, through the medium of an infected atmosphere, whether in the sick room, the church, or the church-yard.

The exhalations arising from dead bodies, interred in the vaults of churches and in church-yards, are, generally, so much diluted with atmospheric air, that they do not commonly affect the health in so immediate and direct a manner, as plainly to indicate the source of these noxious influences. It is only when some accidental circumstances have favoured their accumulation, or concentration in an unusual degree, that the effects become so sensible as obviously to declare their cause.

It may be interesting to some of you to know how parties are affected, who are exposed to the emanations of grave-yards; and I will therefore tell you, in the words of Mr. Barnett, one of the medical officers of the Stepney Union,

who has attentively observed the symptoms. He says, "they are characterized by more or less disturbance of the whole system, with evident depression of the vital force, as evinced throughout the vascular and nervous systems—by the feeble action of the heart and arteries—and lowness of spirits, &c. Head-ache is also a frequent accompaniment, and these maladies, if surrounded with other causes, would, I doubt not, terminate in fevers of the worst description."

Burial in lead has been supposed, by some, to do away with all objection to vaults and catacombs, and even the Bishop of London holds this opinion. It is, however, *erroneous*, and *perfectly untenable*; for it must be very evident to all thinking men, that putrefactive gases are formed as well in lead as in wood, and that they only "bide their time" to escape. Whenever a church is warmed, *the miasma is certain to find its way through the floor* from the vaults beneath, and consequently must be inhaled by the unsuspecting congregation, who are perfectly ignorant of its presence, on account of its being so largely diluted with atmospheric air. Such, then, are the injurious results of parties being allowed to bury their dead in churches.

Let us now return into the grave-yards. Mr. Chadwick, in his able report on this subject, says—"It has been considered that all danger from interment in towns would be obviated, if no burials were allowed, except at a depth of five feet, but bodies buried much deeper are found to decay; and so certain as a body has wasted or disappeared, is the fact, that a deleterious gas has escaped. In the towns where the grave-yards and streets are paved, the morbid matter must be diffused more widely through the subsoil, and escape with *the drainage*."

All interments in towns, whilst bodies are decomposing, contribute to the mass of atmospheric impurity, which is injurious to the public health; for Dr. Reid states, that "if bodies were interred eight or ten feet deep, in

sandy or gravelly soils, little would be gained by it, for *the gases will find a ready exit, from almost any practicable depth.*"

The opinion of Dr. Lyon Playfair, is to the same purport. He considers that the putrid gases *cannot* be thoroughly absorbed by the soil lying over the bodies. He also declares that he knows several burial-grounds, from which most foetid smells are evolved; and gases of similar odour are emitted from the sides of sewers, passing in the vicinity of church-yards, although they are *distant thirty feet* from them.

Intra-mural interment is injurious in another way, which, I dare say, but few persons have ever thought of; I mean by *polluting the water of wells*; and this is far more likely to be the result, where deep interments are resorted to. Mr. Walker, from whom I have before quoted, considers "the health of the inhabitants of large towns is scarcely less affected by the *water* they drink, than by the *air* they breathe. About *twelve-thirteenths* of every dead body *must dissipate*, and the material of which it is compounded pass off in a gaseous form into the atmosphere, or percolate through the loose subsoil, in every direction. In many grave-yards, the natural cohesiveness of the soil is destroyed by the intermixture of animal matter, which finds its way into the *wells* in the neighbourhood, and injures the health of the persons who use the water."

The attention of Dr. Reid was first directed to this matter, in London, when a glass of water was handed to him, at an hotel, which presented a peculiar film on its surface. He set it aside, and, after making numerous inquiries, was satisfied that the appearance, which had attracted his attention, arose from the contents of a church-yard, immediately adjoining the well, where the water had been obtained.

Professor Brande states that he has frequently found well-water contaminated by organic matters and ammoniacal salts, and refers to an instance of one well, near a church-yard, which had *not only acquired odour, but colour*, from the

soil; and mentions other instances, of which he has heard, as justifying the opinion, that, as very many wells are adjacent to church-yards, the accumulating soil of which has been so heaped up, by the succession of dead bodies and coffins, and the products of their decomposition, a *filtering apparatus* has been formed, by which those wells, and all superficial springs, must be *more or less affected*.

In our own city, springs have been repeatedly found charged with animal matter. Mr. White, the chemist, remarks, that on evaporating an imperial gallon of water, from a well near St. Cuthbert's church-yard, when it was reduced to about three quarts the existence of *organic matter* was rendered extremely evident on the surface; and the ordinary tests for *ammonia* indicated its presence most strikingly. To be perfectly satisfied that no fallacy existed, Mr. White repeated the experiment, and each time with a similar result. Mr. Spence likewise found the water from a pump, near St. Sampson's church-yard, to become *quite urinous* when concentrated.

It is stated, in a collection of reports concerning the cemeteries of the town of Versailles, that the water of the wells, which lie below the church-yard of St. Louis, could not be used on account of its *stench*. In consequence of various investigations, a law was passed in France, prohibiting the opening of wells within 100 metres (about 108 yards) of any place of burial; but even this distance is now stated to be insufficient; for *deep wells have been found*, on examination, *to be polluted*, at a distance of 200 metres (216 yards). In some parts of Germany, too, the opening of wells nearer than 300 feet has been prohibited.

How many wells *in York*, then, must be polluted? They can neither be "few nor far between." They must be numerous; and hundreds of unsuspecting individuals are daily drinking the *filterings of human corruption*, to their *present injury*, and hastening the arrival of a *premature death*.

I would, then, urge upon you all, in the strongest language, to exert yourselves, in your respective parishes, to obtain the *immediate closing* of all the parish burial-grounds. I have shown you the terrible extent to which *the violation of the graves* of our friends and relatives is carried—how the *emanations* of both grave-yards and vaults are *injurious to health*—and how the very water which you drink, is rendered impure. Bestir yourselves, then, and, instead of the clergy offering any opposition, from what I know of them, I believe most of them will aid you in your endeavours to obtain so desirable an issue. They will be glad that the popular feeling is so much in unison with their own, and will rejoice that the remains of the departed may be allowed to moulder quietly to that dust from which they were originally formed, and no longer create a *nuisance*—a filthy insidious poison—breeding fever, and all its concomitants, in districts which might be free from every noxious taint, and giving *the lie direct* to our liberal-mindedness, to our delicacy of feeling, and even to our professions of respect for departed brethren.

“If indiscriminate mutilation, and disturbance of previous deposits, and consequent desecration of the last resting places of those who have preceded us, are still to be permitted—if the ashes of our deceased countrymen are entitled to, or obtain too frequently, under the present order of things, no respect—if the ties of relationship and affection, and the best feelings of the heart, are to be outraged by a brutal grave-digger—if a system has long been, and continues in operation, which, most unequivocally, tends to brutalize, to unchristianize, the officials who execute the disgusting work, and the crowds of people exposed to such scenes—if our very beautiful burial service has been too often disgraced by the acts perpetrated previous or subsequent to its performance—*it is more than time that such an evil were crushed, and for ever.* It degrades religion, brings its ministers into contempt, tends to lower the

standard of morality, and is a *foul blot* upon the boasted civilization of England."

Who is not deeply interested in this question? Families, home, kindred, relatives, friends—the thousand sympathies, that have grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength, are so intimately connected with the subject, that, the more deeply we reflect, the more settled must be our conviction, of the *absolute necessity for the abolition of this dreadful nuisance*.

"As Christians, we are called upon to crush, and that *for ever*, a system, that naturally entails and imposes the *daily execution of deeds*, from the perpetration of which *barbarians would recoil* with horror. As men, as members of a civilized community, it is our duty to remove all causes of disease and discomfort, existing more especially among *our poorer brethren*, whose poverty, and whose avocations, too frequently compel their residence in localities where the evil is most prominent."

Most ardently is it to be desired that a body, deserving the name of "legion," would stand forth, and, in grappling with the monster, whose gigantic proportions have overshadowed the land, make it their determination to accept *no compromise*, until, by a well-considered, well-directed, mighty effort, they shall have rendered themselves more victorious than the soldier, whose reputation, built on human sacrifices, is too often based upon the number of his victims, whilst theirs, founded on the preservation of life, shall be registered in the applause of the good—in the gratitude of millions.



YORK HEALTH OF TOWNS' ASSOCIATION.

Presidents.

HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD MAYOR OF YORK.

Chairman of the General Committee.

WILLIAM GRAY, Esq.

Treasurer.

ROBERT DAVIES, Esq.

Honorary Secretaries.

THOS. LAYCOCK, Esq., M.D.

F. W. CALVERT, Esq.

OBJECTS OF THE ASSOCIATION.

To diffuse the valuable information elicited by recent inquiries, and by the advancement of science, as to the physical and moral evils that result from the present defective sewerage and drainage, supply of water, and of air and light, and from the faulty construction of streets and dwelling-houses.

To correct misconceptions as to the expense of the requisite means of improvement.

To remove groundless apprehensions as to interference with existing pecuniary interests.

To devise and endeavour to obtain better means than at present exist for the investigation of the causes of mortality in York and the surrounding district, both in towns and villages.

To endeavour to obtain the prompt removal of those causes of disease which are proved to be removable, and especially to protect the public health, and advise as to the best means of relief, when and wherever fatal epidemical diseases are prevalent.

To correspond with the Health of Towns' Associations established in London or elsewhere, and encourage the formation of Branch or Auxiliary Associations in neighbouring towns.

